

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral Dissertation Thesis

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Hungarian Foreign Policy in the years of international *détente*. Nation-state and Integration Logic in the Era of Superpower Decline

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An Overview of the Thesis

Hungarian foreign policy during the Cold War is a topic of interest for both national and international history. Hungarian historiography tends to approach this topic with an emphasis on limited sovereignty and the imperatives of social compromise. International history, on the other hand, puts stress on the structural force of the Cold War in Europe. In the meantime, the historiography of the Cold War underwent many changes in the past twenty years that is sometimes referred to as the New Cold War History. Not many academic attempts have been made, however, to put those different approaches together and re-examine the whole structure of Hungarian foreign policy during the Kádár regime.

The present thesis attempts at synchronizing the above-mentioned approaches into a single inquiry about Hungarian foreign policy. Drawing from the results of both international and national historiography, as well as from the re-examination of primary sources, a series of new conclusions can be made. Findings at large of such an inquiry casts a fresh light on the fundamental inextricability of international and domestic events. The thesis particularly argues that events in East Asia had a deep impact on the East Central European socialist countries which is mirrored by the conduct of Hungarian foreign policy.

The importance of this topic has many dimensions. First, it is partly a contribution to the national history of foreign policy. New angles, such as the impact of the Sino–Soviet split must be included in the study of the Hungarian domestic scene as well. Second, it aims to add an angle for the future international historiography of the Cold War. The central tenets of such a topic – i.e. the limitation of sovereignty, the ever-growing scope of autonomy, and the inner dynamics of alliance systems – are of definitive interest for all nations' historians. The Hungarian example is interesting as it both represents a country that deviated the most from the Soviet line (in domestic affairs), while tried to maintain absolute "action unity" with the socialist bloc albeit with an increasing focus on issues important from a nation-state perspective. Third, this topic may be a compelling case study for the examination of international relations (IR), present and past. The way alliances work, how they could affect the whole international system, how even loyal alliance members strive to overcome the

obstacles of the system, and what are the limitations of superpower and great power dominations are of utmost importance in dealing with international relations.

Methodology, Sources, and Structure

The present thesis aims to bring together both the results of the national and international historiographies, and also tries to involve different methods from different fields. However, the central tenet of the work is diplomatic history. Consequently, it re-examines primary sources in the light of newer findings of both diplomatic and other fields of history, and primarily relies on them for an inquiry of causes and effects. The thesis also works with other subfields in history: social history, history of ideas, military history, and economic history on a secondary literature level. It also involves a certain amount of IR scholarship in explaining behavioral patterns, decision-making conflicts and motivations.

The primary sources of the thesis are comprised mostly of the archival fonds of the central bodies of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HWSP), the papers of the HWSP Central Committee and the Political Committee. Additionally, they are complemented with papers in foreign archives, state security archives, and the papers of various branches of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. Given that the Foreign Ministry has always played a secondary role in decision-making, those of the central party bureaucracy are more useful in tracking down the origins of particular decisions. The thesis also works with a wide range of secondary sources, both Hungarian and international. Monographs, essay collections, statistical data, and academic journal articles are used in English and Hungarian, sometimes in other languages. The most important academic journals in this field are, *inter alia*, the *Cold War History*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Zeitgeschichte*, *Külügyi Szemle* (formerly *Külpolitika*), *Múltunk*, *Öt kontinens*, *Századok*. The *Cambridge History* series, the three-volume classic on the *Cold War* (2010), and the rather recent on *Communism* (2017) have been also inspirational to this work. The thesis also draws heavily on the working papers of essential institutions dealing with this period, e.g. those of the *Cold War International History Project* at Wilson Center in Washington D.C., and the *Cold War History Research Center* in Budapest.

The structure of this thesis is made up of chapters and subchapters. Chapters generally deal with one single direction in foreign policy. Chapter I is, however, an introduction and a methodological chapter that tries to define the different concepts of *détente*, as well as

content analytical problems in this topic. Chapter II is about Hungarian politics *vis-à-vis* East Asia, the Sino–Soviet split, and the Vietnam War. Chapter III is about the “Southern opening,” that is, the relations between Hungary and the developing countries. Chapter IV is about Hungary’s Western relations, with a subchapter about single bilateral relations with Austria, France, Italy, the U.S., etc., and another subchapter about the relations with the Western integrational organizations, like to the European security conference and the Common Market. Chapter V individually deals with the Federal Republic of Germany and “German question” at large from a Hungarian perspective, in the light of both defense and economy. Chapter VI revolves around Hungarian–Eastern European relations, again with subchapters on how the unity of the “socialist commonwealth” has been fragmented by the Sino–Soviet split, the “German question,” and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Another subchapter deals with the multilateral aspect of converging and diverging interests in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, Comecon). Chapter VII is tries to draw overall conclusions about decision-making in Hungarian foreign policy. In individual subchapters, the changing mental map of Europe, the controversy between professionalism and party loyalty, the free flow of information and the lack thereof, the role of legitimacy and popular opinion, and the clash between national and international interests are dealt with. Chapter VIII concludes the thesis and recapitulates its findings, with an outlook on further research and applicability. Works cited are rendered under Chapter IX. Primary sources, secondary literature, and databases are dealt with individually in subchapters.

Hypotheses and Findings

The doctoral dissertation began with the following hypotheses:

- 1) Hungarian foreign policy has been fundamentally altered by *détente* through the return of nation-state thinking, the emergence of intrabloc divergence, the Sino–Soviet Split, and Romania’s newly adopted foreign policy.
- 2) Hungarian foreign policy has been impacted by the Sino–Soviet split. It was essential for the emancipation of the Eastern European socialist countries.
- 3) Hungarian mediation attempts during the Vietnam War points beyond the generally accepted motivation of “constructive loyalty.” It is argued here, that the Hungarian interest primarily lied in halting a possible Sino–Soviet rapprochement.

4) Hungary widened her relations with the developing world originally to overcome isolation in world politics. Economic experimenting and socialist legitimacy also played a part. Though such relations always remained particular, not a strategic interest, this period still saw the emergence of a peculiar Hungarian *Weltpolitik*.

5) Western relations have been developed gradually where the neutrals took the first place to be followed by France. Western relations, both bilateral and multilateral, have been booming after the European security conference has been put on track. However, the idea of the “West” has been divided: such an opening was applied to Western Europe but not the U.S.

6) In strengthening relations with the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary did not take the potential militarization of Germany at face value. Hungary’s approximation was dictated by foreign trade interests, but it first failed on intrabloc dynamics. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, however, Hungary–FRG relations rushed to the fore, and gradually sidetracked the earlier world political approach.

7) Hungarian relations with the Eastern European socialist countries were characterized by a concurring lobby activities. Hungary stood out with her commitment to intrabloc integration as well as the defense of reform economy. Hungarians even thought of integration as a tool to preserve and spread Hungarian reforms in economy. However, disillusionment with socialist integration led the Hungarian elite to draw closer to the Western integration.

8) Hungarian foreign policy decision-making has always suffered from multiple deficits. Those shortcomings have been easing throughout the years but in a stop-go manner. The slow shift in mental maps, the clash of party loyalty and professionalism in bureaucracy, the questions of publicity and the free flow of information, the synchronizing of national and international interests were challenges to face for Hungarian foreign policy. Probably professing the most internationalist approach in the Eastern bloc, the Hungarian elite disregarded nation-state challenges until the very end of the period.

According to the findings of the thesis, the hypothesis are proven right in their assessment of the motivations and results of Hungarian foreign policy. Most importantly, the Sino–Soviet split as the origin of the relative Eastern European autonomy in foreign policy-making, the Hungarian party’s preoccupation with a potential Sino–Soviet rapprochement, as well as the identification of the national vs. integrational logic as a measure for Hungarian foreign policy has been the novelties of this thesis. Their validity were also proven by the findings of the doctoral thesis.

Conclusion and Further Research

A conclusion of the study is that Hungarian foreign policy has been more profoundly affected by further parts of the international scene than it has been suggested before. *Détente* brought changes to Hungarian foreign policy after the Sino–Soviet split practically gave way to more meaningful emancipation from the Soviet orbit. The motivation of Hungarian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the developing world, the Western countries, and the Eastern European socialist states can be traced back to the pressing needs of domestic policy, but have been sanctioned by the international developments within the socialist world.

The thesis presented offers multiple dimensions for further study. One such dimension is the scrutiny of how Hungarian foreign policy evolved in the 1980s. Another way to further develop the thesis could be a more comprehensive study of the notions of integration in contemporary Hungarian academia and political press. A joint Eastern European research on how each countries saw integrational processes would also be useful. The idea that superpower hegemony started to ebb in Europe, and the European states tried to make use of the situation can be a basis of a research on the notion of empire and superpower in the Cold War.

The approach of diplomatic history might be mostly state-centered, a selection of sub-state actors may also contribute to this research. Communist parties, churches, the socialist “civil society,” and the international peace movement are also worth examining as to what impact they have had on Hungarian foreign policy.

Works by the Author in Related Fields

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